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Arweck and Collins's "Reading Religion in Text and Context: Reflections of Faith and Practice in Religious Materials" & Arweck and Keenan's "Materializing Religion: Expression, Performance and Ritual" - Book Review

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ARWECK, Elisabeth, and COLLINS, Peter (eds.), *Reading Religion in Text and Context: Reflections of Faith and Practice in Religious Materials* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. xvi + 193. ISBN 0-7546-5482-6, Cloth, £47.50.

ARWECK, Elisabeth, and KEENAN, William (eds.), *Materializing Religion: Expression, Performance and Ritual* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. xiv + 242. ISBN 0-7546-5094-4, Cloth, £55.

Ashgate has published two new books in the *Theology and Religion in Interdisciplinary Perspective* series. Edited collections of essays, they range widely and in each case, while there are specific essays which relate directly to Quaker Studies, others in the volume do so only tangentially, if at all.

Reading Religion in Text and Context asks the questions: To what extent is religion inherently textual? and What might the term 'textual' mean in relation to religious

faith and practice? The one essay in this volume specifically relevant to Quaker Studies is 'Reading Religious Architecture' by Peter Collins.

'Reading Religious Architecture' explores four ways in which religious buildings have been read or understood: as genre, as sign-system, as ritual-architectural event, and as 'storied'. Arguing that a reading of architecture is integral to a full understanding of religious faith and practice, Collins bases his discussion on a case study of Dibbenshaw Meeting House, linking his interpretations of the building to Quaker theology, history, practice and narrative. The strength of the essay lies in Collins's attempt to develop a methodology and vocabulary with which to approach an analysis of religious architecture, and it will be interesting to see if 'readings' of other British meeting houses provide similar results.

Other essays in the volume include examinations of Catholic, Evangelical and Buddhist texts, the use of 'sacred texts' in discussions of human rights, music in modern Revivalism and explorations of the liminal space between the religious and the secular.

Materializing Religion focuses on the material symbol as a central part of understanding religion in late modernity. It explores the lived experience of religion through its material expressions, including music, architecture, festivals, ritual, artefacts, dance, dress and magic. Two essays in this volume are specifically relevant: 'The Shape of Faith or the Architectural Forms of the Religious Life' by Simon Coleman and Peter Collins; and 'Wrapped Attention: Revelation and Concealment in Nonconformism' by Peter Collins and Pink Dandelion.

Like Collins's essay in *Reading Religion*, 'The Shape of Faith' is concerned with the interaction between worshippers and the architectural space within which they worship. The authors discuss and interpret the church buildings used by two contrasting congregations, one a conservative Protestant charismatic group belonging to the Prosperity or Faith movement, the other Darlington Friends' Meeting. While the contrast is interesting, much of the section on Darlington consists of basic explanations of Friends' history and theology and the interpretation of how Friends use and are affected by their physical space is much more limited than that provided in 'Reading Religious Architecture'.

'Wrapped Attention' is a much more challenging and thought-provoking essay which applies the concept of 'wrapping', as developed by the anthropologist Joy Hendry in relation to Japanese society, to British Nonconformist religious groups, particularly the religious Society of Friends. Collins and Pink Dandelion interrogate the ways in which 'sects, such as the Quakers, which offer characteristically immediate and unmediated spiritual experiences, paradoxically wrap the means and expression of those experiences in a way which directs and ultimately limits participation' (p. 45). Arguing that 'wrapping practices' serve to differentiate believers and worshippers from the wider community around them, they examine the prescriptions and proscriptions which govern Quaker silent worship, 'structuring and channelling the reception, celebration and communication of the Word' (p. 46). This is an original and sometimes arresting essay which pushes the reader to look at silent worship in new ways.

Other topics in the collection include the religious heritage of South West Wales, religious dance in Germany and nineteenth-century sacred dress.

Although the books are presented as multi-faith, the majority of essays in both volumes are about Christian religious groups. Only three of the fifteen essays in *Materializing Religion* are about non-Christian religion (two on witchcraft and one on Tibetan Buddhism) as are two of the eleven essays in *Reading Religion in Text and Context* (one on Nottingham Sufis and one on Indian Buddhism, with some discussion of Welsh Muslims and human rights in a third article).

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